

## Generations

# Hit movies on a shoestring budget

In keeping with the Academy Awards set to run Sunday, Feb. 24, one wonders if indeed it takes a lot of money to produce a winning movie at the box office.

The movie-going public is often fickle in deciding which movie to take the plunge on and peel out at minimum \$10 a head — plus popcorn, soda and a large box of overpriced candy. Adding it all up would feed lunch and dinner to a family of four.

But there are successful movies that were made on a shoestring budget and happily shocked backers with an enormous profit thanks to an audience constantly in a state of flux and wanting something completely different for their hard-earned money.

According to [www.editorchoice.com](http://www.editorchoice.com), here are a couple that were complete surprises at the box office.

Now, I didn't see "Paranormal Activity," but the 2007 film was shot with a \$15,000 budget using a hand-held camera in seven days.

Even more staggering, its director, Oren Peli, had no filmmaking experience. However, the film made an incredible \$193 million and started a franchise with a handful of sequels.

Peli no doubt wanted to somehow duplicate the all-time 1999 winner, "The Blair Witch Project," which had a \$60,000 budget. I saw this one and it did creep me out. Its "mocku-

mentary" genre had been explored and sold as a real-life tale from found-footage.



**Peg DeMarco**

Audiences believed in the marketing campaign and weren't sure if what they were watching

was real or not. The film made an impressive \$248 million, making it the most profitable film of all time in terms of percentage.

I also saw "Open Water" about a couple who become stranded in shark-infested waters during a scuba dive and have to survive. It was made on a \$130,000 budget, but made \$55 million when released in 2003. People will always spring for movie tickets when sharks are involved (well, except for "Sharknado").

"Mad Max" with Mel Gibson was made for only \$300,000 in 1979, but made \$1 million, which at the time was an enormous sum. For a while, it held the Guinness world record for the best profit-to-cost film.

Its sequel "Mad Max: Fury Road" had a budget of \$150 million, a whole lot more dough, but it ended up making a hefty profit of \$378 million.

In the same ballpark budget, the first "Halloween" also had a \$300,000 budget in 1978. It's ru-

mored that Jamie Lee Curtis' wardrobe only cost the production company \$100, yet Halloween went on to gross \$70 million worldwide.

"My Left Foot" with Daniel Day-Lewis had a \$600,000 budget back in 1989. The film made \$14.7 million at the box office and picked up two Oscars, including Best Actor for Day-Lewis.

"American Graffiti" had a \$750,000 budget and was George Lucas' first project. Yes, the king of "Star Wars" was relatively unknown before "American Graffiti" and he took a chance and poured what he had into the production. It paid off as it made \$115 million at the box office and launched his career.

And no list is complete without "Rocky," which was made for \$1 million, but made \$117 million and won three Oscars, with plenty of sequels to follow. I didn't realize this, but Sylvester Stallone wrote the script over a weekend, which launched him to global fame.

The romantic comedy "My Big Fat Greek Wedding" was a surprise hit after its release in 2002. The \$5 million budget was so small that they only spent \$1 million on its marketing efforts. The film was written by and starred Nia Vardalos, who plays a Greek woman intending to marry a non-Greek man.

The family dynamics portrayed on screen struck

an emotional chord with people around the world, and it made \$368 million at the box office.

"Moonlight" broke all ceilings when it was released in 2016, including winning the 2017 Oscar for best picture. It was made for \$4 million but made \$65 million, at the box office and won three Oscars.

Everyone loved Bill Murray and Scarlett Johansson in "Lost in Translation."

It's hard to believe it was only shot with a \$4 million budget.

Sofia Coppola wrote and directed the 2003 film, which became a massive hit at the box office, making \$119 million around the world.

And who can forget the amazing success of Jordan Peele's 2017 hit "Get Out?" The budget was \$4.5 million, but the scathing social commentary earned an Oscar for Best Original Screenplay. Its theatrical run made \$255 million.

Last on the list due to column space is "Pulp Fiction" with its \$8.5 million budget. Quentin Tarantino's film practically defines the 1990s and is one of the most iconic films in the world.

It cemented Tarantino's place in Hollywood and also made a mighty good profit of \$213 million at the box office.

Peg DeMarco is a Morganton resident who writes a weekly features column for The News Herald. Contact her at [pegdemarco@earthlink.net](mailto:pegdemarco@earthlink.net).